

Statement For The Record

Iridium Satellite LLC

Hearing on Weaponizing Space:
Is Current U.S. Policy Protecting Our National Security

Before The
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs
United States House of Representatives

Wednesday, May 23, 2007

Iridium Satellite supports the Subcommittee's hearing on an issue that is of critical importance to our continued ability to operate safely in space and thus to our national security. As a member of the Satellite Industry Association (SIA), we support Mr. Cavossa's testimony and wish to particularly emphasize his points regarding the importance of the commercial satellite industry to our economy, Homeland Security, and National Security. We also support ongoing Government-Industry efforts to strengthen the Mission Assurance Working Group (MAWG) as the link between the US Government and commercial operators for information sharing, participation in training and exercises, and space situational awareness. We encourage continued funding of the Commercial and Foreign Entities (CFE) pilot program to provide space surveillance data to commercial operators to help promote safe operations in space.

As the operator of the world's largest commercial Low-Earth Orbit (LEO), Iridium has a particular interest in prevention of space debris and in enabling real-time communication between the STRATCOM Joint Space Operations Center (JSPOC) which could provide warning of predicted satellite-debris conjunction. The recent test produced tens of thousands of pieces of space debris, many of which are too small to track but which represent a threat to operations in LEO. The approximately 800 pieces which can be tracked represent, by our calculations, an 8% increase in the background debris level and an equivalent increase in danger to the safe operation of LEO satellites. Given that operations in space incur a certain degree of risk, we support internationally accepted and agreed measures to minimize orbital debris, to increase space surveillance and situational awareness, and to provide advance warning of conditions which might threaten the safety of spacecraft. Iridium and all satellite operators are concerned about the deliberate destruction of anything in space that can cause additional debris and risk to our spacecraft. They are expensive and not easily replaced, and we believe ALL governments should avoid targeting spacecraft of any kind.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this important issue and stand by to provide additional information and testimony that would support the activities of the Subcommittee.